

Baker Trip Leaves U.S. Officials Genera

By Don Oberdorfer
Washington Post Staff Writer

Secretary of State James A. Baker III returned from Moscow yesterday with positive answers to the two big questions surrounding the U.S.-Soviet summit that starts May 30: Is Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev strong enough to be a solid negotiating partner? Can the Moscow-Lithuania struggle be contained enough to avoid major damage to the summit?

Although the answer to each question was yes, neither was a resounding verdict.

Reflecting what he called a "generally upbeat" telephone call from Baker, President Bush told reporters on Air Force One yesterday, "I'm satisfied from the progress made in Moscow that we'll have a good summit."

Bush said the summit agenda will include areas of major differences with Moscow, such as the future of a united Germany and regional issues such as Afghanistan and Cuba. Bush said the U.S.-Soviet relationship "is far better . . . than sometimes in the past, but less good than I wish it were."

In the arms negotiations with Baker, Gor-

bachev and Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze showed that they can make and eventually enforce decisions. According to U.S. officials, this point was in doubt for the first time this spring because of Moscow's contradictory positions on some arms issues.

Baker's mission achieved U.S.-Soviet agreement on cruise missiles issues that had bedeviled the arms talks for years, and that many observers felt could never be resolved. Bush and Gorbachev, as a result, should be able to make good on their promise to agree at the coming summit on all major points of a landmark strategic arms reduction treaty.

While the final result was positive, U.S. officials said the new and nettlesome role of the Soviet military continued to be evident during the Baker mission on the high-tech U.S. cruise missile program called Tacit Rainbow. The United States sought to exclude this missile from the nuclear reduction treaty because it is not armed with nuclear weapons. In a Kremlin meeting Friday afternoon, Gorbachev appeared to accept its exclusion in discussions with Baker and, according to U.S. accounts, the two men

shook hands on the deal across the negotiating table.

A few hours later, however, U.S. negotiators were surprised to hear several stiff conditions placed on the deal when they met their Soviet counterparts, Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Karpov and arms negotiator Yuri Nazarkin—who were accompanied by three uniformed members of the General Staff of the Soviet Armed Forces, including Col. Gen. Branislav Omelichev, deputy chief of staff. Omelichev, who accompanied Karpov to Washington last month, had appeared for the first time with Gorbachev at the Kremlin negotiating table earlier Friday, along with retired Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, Gorbachev's personal arms adviser.

It took much of Friday night and Saturday morning—as well as some bitter arguments—to hammer out solutions to the objections that were raised in the negotiators' meeting. The conclusion of some members of Baker's party is that the day of sweeping and clear-cut concessions from Moscow on arms issues is ending as the military insists on more of a role, before or even after Gorbachev or Shevardnadze have spoken. "It's

Gorbachev Optimistic on Summit

like a return to the old style of Soviet negotiating" with tough and time-consuming battles on weapons issues of interest to the Soviet military, a U.S. expert said.

Despite massive problems and challenges from almost every quarter, the Gorbachev that Baker met in the Kremlin appeared to be as confident, almost cocky, as ever, officials said. He negotiated with Baker for five hours on a wide variety of issues without looking at a single note or asking help from experts, said a member of the Baker party. At one point he referred to a pileup of problems he must face, explicitly asking Baker not to tax him with minor issues. Some members of the U.S. team said they felt Gorbachev appeared to show weariness and other signs of the pressure he is under, but others disagreed.

On the Baltic issues, it was hard for the Baker party to believe it was pure coincidence that Gorbachev met for the first time since the onset of the crisis with a senior Lithuanian leader, Prime Minister Kazimiera Prunskiene, while Baker was in Moscow.

By all accounts, Gorbachev took relatively unyielding positions in the meeting with

Prunskiene and he spoke to Baker of the sharp political limits on his flexibility on Baltic secession questions. Nevertheless, last week's events suggest there is more of a chance than before for establishing a negotiating process between Moscow and Lithuania, as Bush, Baker and many of the Western European leaders have been urging.

Before Bush decided April 24 not to impose sanctions against Moscow for its economic blockade of Lithuania, he and Baker indicated that U.S. economic benefits to the Soviet Union were at risk in the Baltic dispute. A signal that this is still so was Baker's conspicuous failure Saturday to list the U.S.-Soviet trade agreement among accords ready for signing by Gorbachev and Bush at the summit, although virtually all work on the trade agreement has been completed.

Given the current economic crisis, a U.S. trade agreement and most-favored-nation trade status for the Soviet Union is probably much more important domestically to Gorbachev than is a strategic arms pact. Thus the stakes are high for all sides in the Moscow-Baltics maneuvering as the Washington summit approaches.